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ABSTRACT

This book, which is based on the personal and professional experience of a Head Start program director, presents a detailed argument against funding early childhood programs through local school districts. Chapter I examines the fact that so many children in the wealthiest country of the world have such a small chance to succeed. Chapter II argues that it doesn't make sense to add state-funded preschools and early childhood programs to the bureaucratic mess of the schools. Chapter III envisions the possibility that if the school becomes the authoritative child caregiver, parents will relinquish the caregiver role. Chapter IV asserts that new public preschool and early childhood programs will encourage kindergarten entrance requirements and reinforce the idea that the child must be ready for kindergarten, rather than the reverse. Chapter V points out that elementary school buildings and playgrounds are not soft, supportive, and secure environments for 2-, 3-, and 4-year-olds. Chapter VI indicates disturbing trends resulting from the acceptance of child care for children under 5 years of age. Chapter VII describes the author's model for good infant and early childhood programs, namely, those developed by the religious communities of the Society of Brothers. Chapter VIII presents conclusions. (RH)

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A CASE AGAINST PUBLIC SCHOOL

EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

BY

FRANCIS WARDLE, PH.D.

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by

Francis Wardle, Ph.D.

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INTRODUCTION

Public funding of early childhood programs - both by the federal government and state governments - has become politically popular. Some such programs are already in place. The federally funded Head Start program (one of President Johnson's Great Society Anti Poverty Programs) has a successful history of over 20 years; federal monies are given to state governments to educate handicapped children, and several state governments are currently funding some form of preschool program. With this trend of funding state and federal early childhood programs has come two other trends: the imposition of state and federal regulations in the area of early childhood curriculums and testing, and channeling this new money through local school districts. This latter trend is somewhat surprising, since most Head Start programs are not administered locally by schools (for obvious reasons) and because schools do not have experience with this age group.

This short book is a timely argument against funding early childhood programs through local districts. It does not argue against quality infant and early childhood programs. I am convinced these programs are critical to the future of this country, and that state governments and the federal government should be involved in making these services available and in assuring quality programs.

I am the product of institutional infant and child care programs (provided by the Lutheran Society of Brothers).

As a young teen I was fascinated by infants and caring for young children - holding my twin cousins, and asking to help in the children's program's of the Hulterian Society of Brothers. I eventually received a Ph.D. in Infant and Early Childhood Education from the University of Kansas.

For years I have been the director of a large Head Start program. I successfully started a child care program for children whose parents attended a government training program. I was unsuccessful in my attempts to have my employer provide quality child care for employees (they said it would discriminate against employees without children) I have testified in Washington for the need of Head Start to expand services to meet the needs of working parents; I am a member of several local committees charged to examine how quality child care can be made for available and affordable, and I have been involved in many conferences and meetings addressing quality and affordable child care.

My extensive writings have examined the healthy family, and how society can either support or destroy the family through its efforts - however honorable they may seem. My views on the family and child care have appeared in professional journals, in the popular press, on the radio, and on TV.

My experience working with my four childrens schools has lead me to seriously question whether local public schools are a logical solution for our infant and child care needs. My extensive involvement in school reform - through

alternative schools in Taos, New Mexico, and Kansas City, Missouri; alternative education conferences; and as a founding member of the Parents Union, in Denver, Colorado - has further convinced me to challenge this notion.

Much of my educational experience has been with minority children and their families. Through this experience, I have learned most traditional public schools do a very poor job of meeting the educational needs of these children. Since much of the political thrust of these public supported programs is to impact this particular group, it does not make sense to me to place these programs in public schools.

Daily struggles with my own young children, my discussions with Head Start parents and staff, and my observations of societal impacts on children and families today, has made me aware of the tremendously difficult task of raising healthy children. I am convinced this society's approach to raising young children - especially high risk children - must be changed for society to survive as we know it. I am also convinced some of that change will have to involve legislation and public dollars. And all public institutions that impact our children and families - courts, schools, welfare, departments of social services, and Head Start - must be carefully examined.

This book is an attempt by a concerned father and committed child professional to carefully address the issue of care of children before school age, and to suggest public

dollars given to local public schools is not a logical, realistic, or effective solution to this problem.

This book is not an academic treatise that quotes knowledgeable professionals, child care experts, policy makers, and groups that advocate for children. Although I can quote research and references with the best of my colleagues, I have chosen to write this book - one person's opinion - in everyday english. The issues addressed in this book require a bigger audience than academic professionals: care of our children affects all of us.

CHAPTER I

CHILDREN IN CRISIS

Educational, political and public support of publicly funded early childhood programs has developed because many students are failing to develop into responsible, mature, tax paying citizens. Many drop out of schools, others 'graduate' with no marketable skills, still others become pregnant. Society has recognized a critical problem. Public early childhood programs are being tauted as the solution. To understand why this solution is being proposed, we must clearly understand the problem. The problem is many children in this society are at risk. The 'at risk' notion is a popular educational, medical, social service, and political term. Each discipline defines 'at risk' differently. In educational terms 'at risk' means there are certain characteristics of young children that predict poor school performance. These are poverty, single parent homes, poor language development, minority status, and teen parents.

This chapter will examine why so many children in the wealthiest country of the world have such a small chance to succeed. Once I have articulated the factors that cause this sad state of affairs, I will discuss whether a preschool year of publicly funded programs can really be expected to significantly impact this problem. Many children in this society have very negative early experiences. This is due to a variety of complex societal

factors, including the tremendous impact of inappropriate TV, a welfare system that teaches dependency and misuse of property to millions of children, instant poverty of women-headed families, blatant materialism and exploitation of children to sell products, inadequate housing, inappropriate or no parent supervision and direction, child abuse, teenagers having children, and non-existent or poor quality child care.

Many books have been written about the negative impacts on young children in America today. My point here is just to touch on some of those impacts, show how they produce high risk children that enter our schools, and suggest that fundamental changes of these factors are needed. Many of these changes would be difficult, expensive, and politically very unpopular.

These problems have developed slowly, over time in this society. They have developed in part because we have been so concerned with basic American values and beliefs - capitalism, First Amendment rights, the right to divorce - often at the expense of our children. Because children cannot vote, and have limited purchasing power, their interests have been ignored in the ongoing struggle to define these rights. Children have also suffered from poor schools, a dehumanizing welfare system, and a religious inability to deal with adolescent sexual activity.

These societal factors are complex parts of contemporary American culture. They are extremely

difficult, expensive - and yes - unpopular issues for politicians to solve. Solving them would require legislation limiting the ability of businessmen to make money, requiring greater parental responsibility, and elevating children to a status in society where they could have direct influence on policies and laws. Politicians want an easy way out. The solution? Fund public infant and early childhood programs! This would require minimal public dollars to solve the problems of dropouts, low literacy, poor education of minorities and the poor, and the dehumanization of TV overdose.

TV has become one of the most destructive forces in a young child's life. The growth of the cable industry, along with the availability of videos, has increased this problem. We all have our horror stories to tell. I remember watching an R-rated movie in a home on the Indian Pueblo in Taos, New Mexico. The owner's 5-year-old son was watching the movie. Finally, when she noticed how uncomfortable I was, she said, "I'll turn it off if you don't want your children to watch"! When my wife and I looked for care for our first child we visited a home care provider in Kansas City with our one-year-old. The room was dark, expensive crystal was on the low, polished tables, and a color TV was on in the corner. We questioned what the child did all day, and how she kept the crystal intact. "I teach them to mind, and they sit and watch TV," was her somewhat indignant reply. In my head start program a mother was very upset about the aggressive

behavior of her four-year-old. She was sure it was caused by his watching many violent TV programs, but she seemed quite shocked when the teacher suggested she remove the TV from the child's room.

Why is TV so destructive for young children? There are many reasons: I'll just briefly outline some of the major problems. The first - and mayte biggest - problem with TV is that it prevents children from engaging in all the typical childhood experiences. In homes where there is no TV, or where it is carefully controlled, the young children must do a whole gamut of activities just to stay occupied: play, paint, cycle, climb, skip, make mud pies, bang on pots and pans, read, dress up, make play houses, act out plays, garden, balance on a beam, etc. Children often must create or make-up activities to stay occupied. They must act on their environment. These are all positive activities for young children to do. Some are messy, others involve parent supervision, still others require resolution of arguments, or help with a word: all require an effort on the part of the parent. TV does not. You just sit the kid in front of the TV, and go about your business.

So the TV - even if its content were neutral, which its not - is destructive because it prevents children from progressing through normal developmental stages by interacting with other children and their environment. Of course children don't interact with TV at all - they are just passive watchers.

The content problems of TV can be divided into two parts: commercials and programs. The problems with commercials for children is really the same as commercials for adults: use of lots of money and sophistication to sell products by capitalizing on the less than honorable human characteristics - greed, fear, envy, selfishness, power and sexual domination. Unfortunately children are not mature enough to resist this hard sell; they are also developing concepts, moral behaviors, and values. Thus these very effective commercials have developed the value system of a whole generation of children.

TV commercials teach children that they will be successful if they wear certain clothes and drive a certain car; they will score if they drink a certain beer; white lies and double standards are exceptable moral behaviors; and no-one works for a living. Commercials that advertise adult oriented programs and films within child oriented programs are also a problem. An adolescent sex film; a comedy series based on sexual game playing, or a gruesome news flash has no place with a child's program.

Of course it will be argued children who see commercials in moderation, and have parents who explain to them the fallacy of what they are seeing, will not be damaged by them. This is correct. Unfortunately many children are overdosed on TV, and receive no parent interpretation - especially the at risk children this book addresses. The statistic that shows some school age

children spend more time in front of a TV then they spend in a classroom is well known. These are the children most impacted by TV.

This is also true of children and content. A balanced childhood of many challenging activities, close parent attention, and selective TV watching is a positive upbringing. For those children who watch lots of TV, and do very little else, the content is terrible!

Adult TV entertainment - lots of sex and violence - is obviously destructive for young children. But so are what are considered regular childrens programs, especially cartoons. These programs show violence and death totally out of the context of the human experience. There is no attempt to negotiate, to compromise, to develop a win-win solution. There is no attempt to show the children the grief and suffering that violence produces, and the fact it never solves a problem. Many at risk children first run into severe problems with societies systems - schools, police, etc. - because they have not learned the appropriate way to solve problems and conflicts. They solve them the way TV characters do.

Maybe the biggest problem with TV program content is that it is written and produced by adults; using adult moral standards; assuming children can view the programs from the same moral perspective. They cannot. Young children have very unsophisticated moral development. They don't understand subtleties; exceptions; fantasy vs. reality, etc.

The problem of TV for young children is clear. What are the solutions?

The solutions are complex, multi-faceted, and unpopular. First this society must recognize the TV is a negative intrusion into the home. We have laws against children drinking, smoking, using drugs, and buying pornographic materials. Yet we have no laws about TV content and what children view in the home. Because in America a person's home is his castle, we have problems controlling a parent watching an X-rated movie at home, or letting his child watch a violent TV program.

How do we control what children watch at home? We educate the parents about the destructive nature of TV; we provide a selection box that parents can preprogram to prevent children from viewing certain programs, and that automatically screens out commercials; the government radically controls all so-called children's programs; and commercial TV is very restricted in what they can show during the early evening hours. This includes commercials for the latest Friday the 13th movies.

The central proposals here are two-fold: parent education and government controls. And they both relate directly to the topic of this book. Public monies could be used to teach parents about the negative impact of TV on their children: TV public service announcements, radio spots, fliers with welfare payments, discussion during the federal program that provides food supplement for women and

infants with dietary needs, billboards, school newsletters, high school classes, etc. Government control is a very unpopular subject today - politicians would much rather back a preschool bill that claims to do the same things.

Many high risk children come from dysfunctional families. Child abuse, drugs, poor parenting skills, alcoholism, etc., are all causes of dysfunction. To address this problem we must develop a comprehensive program of support, education, and intervention. An early childhood program that does not effectively address and positively impact the family environment to which the child returns everyday will not positively impact that child. We must look at the total family; we must develop programs to correct destructive family environments.

As a society we must train future parents! Parenting classes in high school: pre-marriage - license programs, high impact, entertaining TV programs on parenting, church conducted programs and columns in the local paper on parenting should all be developed. State supported child care and early childhood programs should have parent-education components that parents are mandated to attend. As a society we must understand good parenting involves specific skills that must be learned; bad parenting causes very expensive results.

We wait for a family to run into trouble before we provide help and support. Parents who have abused their children must take parenting classes; families who loose the

father are eligible for AFDC; families whose parents are unemployed are eligible for food stamps and low income housing. As a society we should develop ways to support the stable family before it runs into trouble. Clearly this would be cheaper for society; it would also be better for our children. If we continue to view the family as the basic social unit of this society, we must spend money to support healthy family units.

Finally we must go into destructive homes and remove children who cannot develop under the home environment. We must look beyond the rights of the natural parents to the responsibility of the society to its children, and the cost to society of children who develop in a destructive environment.

We also need to develop a substitute family model that provides positive, healthy support for children whose natural family cannot, or will not, provide the needed structure and nurturance.

Teenagers having babies is this country's number one social problem. It is more destructive than drugs. Its an epidemic. Children born of high-risk teenagers have almost no chance of succeeding. Lots of people are struggling to develop solutions - and I don't have all the answers, either. I do know the problem should be talked about and made a high priority. We should be saying, "just say no to sex without protection" on our TV's, car bumpers stickers and radios. We should have programs on MTV and other

teenage channels that communicate the importance of sexual responsibility; churches must do a better job of working with their youth. Alcoholism, drugs, and sexual activity are all adolescent behaviors this society is struggling to control. We have outlawed drugs and alcohol; we have developed expensive anti alcohol and anti drug media programs; we have created support groups in high schools and the community to right against drugs and alcohol and we provide extensive education to our children in these two areas. But teenage pregnancy is still, to all practical purposes, ignored and swept under the rug. The irony of distributing condoms to adolescents to prevent AIDS, rather than a prevention of unwanted pregnancies illustrates our unrealistic approach to the problem. As a society we have determined no-one is responsible enough to take drugs, and one must be 21 to consume alcohol, yet a 13 year old is responsible enough to keep and raise a child - the most difficult job in the world!

A 15-year-old recently spent some time with our family. A pretty black girl from the inner city, she'd spend hours getting ready for church. She always wore makeup, a dress, and heels when she attended. I asked her why she always dressed up for church. "In our church we have to wear a dress and look nice to attend," she commented.

"Do any of your school friends who attend church have babies - are any pregnant?," I asked curiously.

"Oh yes, many do - and they bring their babies to church."

"In their Sunday best!" I thought to myself. There seems something a little strange with these values.

Clearly this issue gets us right back to TV . One of the less-than-objective forces TV advertisers use to sell products is sex. Many popular songs, videos and soap operas teach young people the power, importance and influence of sex.

And teenagers struggling with sexual urges, peer pressure, physical changes, and low self-esteem are extremely vulnerable to suggestive songs and videos that imply sleeping together is the cool thing to do. Some states are making grandparents of babies liable for support costs. This is a good idea. Parents who refuse to allow their children to attend sex education classes should, when signing the refusal, also sign that if their child become pregnant before age 21, the grandparents will support that child, not the state.

Most importantly this epidemic should receive far more exposure, attention, public funds, and efforts by all to solve. It won't go away, and it is a major source of high-risk students.

Our welfare system needs to be reformed. Its a system that encourages the break-up of the family, pays women for having children, and discourages initiative and independence. Poor parents with children cannot afford to

get off welfare, because they loose the health insurance and other benefits for their children. They would be foolish to accept a job for $3.35 an hour with no health insurance for their children. So they don't.

A Head Start parent collected cans to give her a little spending money. Her social service technician told her she would have to declare those few dollars as income, and thus receive less from welfare. Another parent was told she would loose her child care support if she enrolled in a training program.

We should have a system that rewards people for going out and earning money. We should have a system that encourages clients to use less electricity, encourages them to repair their title 8 housing, etc. The entire welfare system must be changed to reinforce the habits, behaviors and attitudes required to live without welfare. Because the basic unit of American society - the nuclear family - is in such serious trouble - we must have a welfare system that actively and continually supports every aspect of a healthy family. Our welfare system must be designed to put the family back together.

The current system does the opposite!

Poor families cannot afford to buy a house. Many middle class families - including mine - cannot afford this American dream either. These families must rent - which makes them beholden to the landlord. Many cities allow landlords to discriminate against families; my own

experience trying to rent in Denver illustrates the difficulty of renting a house or apartment for a family with more than two children. The other alternative is public housing - with all of its well known problems. The problem of adequate housing for many of this country's children will always exist under the current free enterprise system that views buildings as investment properties. This system automatically discriminates against families, because children create lots of wear and tear on property, and because, per person, families - especially those with young children - have less expendable income than single adults. This problem is especially critical for one parent homes and large families.

Thus many of these families end up in housing projects - very negative environments to raise children.

CHAPTER II

SCHOOL PROGRAMS ARE NOT THE ANSWER

The move toward publicly funded preschools and early childhood programs has developed for several reasons. Educators, legislators and minority leaders have become very concerned with the inability of this society to prepare an entire section of its population for successful citizenship. Many of our children are dropping out of school early, becoming pregnant (or making someone else pregnant), having trouble with the law, and trying to enter the job market with insufficient skills and education. Public schools spend a large percentage of their budgets attempting to address these problems; business, industry, and society in general pay a heavy cost for these failures.

In an attempt to address these problems two central concepts have developed: children who are likely to succumb to one of these problems can be defined as "at risk"; and the solution is a preschool program. The interest in providing publicly funded preschool and early childhood programs to solve these problems comes from the success of the 23-year-old Head Start demonstration project, the High/Scope sponsored Perry Preschool Project (which has aggressively advertised its results to educators and legislators), the popularity of Head Start among low income citizens, minorities, and politicians, and convincing lobbying efforts by those who believe in preschool programs.

The desperate need to solve our high-risk youth problems has been neatly solved by the popular interest and research support for preschool programs. The fit is natural and logical.

The convincing argument presented to law makers is that money spent on early childhood programs today will save lots of public dollars later on. It will reduce early pregnancies, the number of dropouts and the need for remedial classes, while providing better educated citizens for the workforce and society.

The need to address these basic social issues is clear. Suggesting early childhood programs are part of the solution also makes sense. But attaching these programs to existing public school structures won't work.

Head Start programs have been researched more than any other social program. Once continual area of research is the lasting effects of the program. A body of research demonstrates many Head Start children loose the gains they made shortly after they enter public school. This is because the school does not support the child's continued development. Many schools quickly undo the progress made by the local Head Start program. Federal dollars that have been used to provide additional supports to these children during their first years in the local schools have been quite successful. These children do far better than Head Start children who don't receive added support. This

suggests money might be better spent improving the public school rather than in providing a public preschool program.

Another area of Head Start research examined how well local Head Start programs changed to meet the changing needs of their community. The research showed Head Start programs attached to public schools (an accepted Head Start relationship) were far less likely to respond to community needs than programs not attached to public schools.

High risk students - minorities, low income students, students with handicaps and learning disabilities, and students from dysfunctional and high-stress homes - are the very students public schools have been unable to serve effectively. These students are concentrated in the inner-city schools of our nation. Students who are lucky enough to graduate from these schools and find a college which will accept them, often have trouble succeeding because of poor high school preparation. Of course many students never graduate, and enter the work world totally unprepared. These students have learned poor habits, skills and attitudes from these very schools.

How will adding a year to these children's school experience help them? Does it make sense to add an additional year to something that doesn't work? Do we want to expand failure? Do we want the child to drop out one year earlier?

If we are saying the problems of high-risk students can be solved by getting these children into school one year

earlier, then we are saving the child and his parent(s) is the problem, and the school is the solution. I do not agree: I believe often the central problem is the school.

Although the purpose of this book is not to add another chapter to the critique of American public education, if early child programs are going to become part of the public school system, then it is our responsibility to examine the large institution that we wish to expand. A major problem with large school districts (all our city schools, and many of our suburban schools) is their large, complex, unworkable bureaucratic structures and procedures, and their endless organization charts and levels of authority. These bureaucratic problems almost brought American industry to a stand-still. Central administrations, too much paperwork, no individual authority and accountability and people primarily concerned with protecting their own positions and building power bases, characterized these failing industries. But, as we know, American industry has undergone a fantastic turn around. They have become lean , efficient, accountable and competitive.

Public-sector organizations, including public schools, have not responded positively to the examples of American industry. Infact, most are worse than they were before: more programs, more administrators, more duplication and paperwork, and more centralization. Each district administrates standard school programs, programs for gifted students, early childhood programs, anti drop-out programs,

say-'no'-to-drug programs, PR departments, special education and vocational education programs. The Denver Public Schools currently runs 9 different programs designed to reduce the incidence of dropouts from the district. An additional 6 programs have been proposed on top of these 9 programs, because the dropout problem is not being solved. Thus a potential 15 separate programs, each with their own budget, administrator, and community board, will exist to tackle this one problem.

A gamut of community advisory boards oversee programs, many special interest groups must be satisfied, and administrators spend most of their time reporting to boards and writing reports. Everyone is tremendously busy doing their job: few direct services trickle down to the children and their parents.

All of these programs address critical issues faced by our children and families. I question, however, whether we should continually add programs and responsibilities to a top-heavy, monolithic, unresponsive bureaucratic system. Any time there is a new social concern, everyone just says, "Well, teach the kids in school," or, "Lets develop an anti-drug, or anti-stranger, or anti-aids, anti gang curriculum for the schools." We cannot just keep adding and adding programs. Especially when there are severe problems with the school's basic instructional programs.

A new federally funded program was recently adopted by a large city school. A director was hired, obligatory

community advisory board formed, district office space provided, and a budget adopted. This program was designed to address family needs that might impact a child's school performance: child care, after school care, transportation, support for one parent homes, and parent training.

After more than a year this program had achieved very little. Why? There are two main reasons. One, most of the administrator's time is spent at advisory board meetings, sending memos through several supervisors to the person who can make decisions, and copying all correspondence to half the school administration "to protect my position and those of my bosses." The other problem is that other administrators within the system, including the head of early childhood education, are so threatened by this new program they sabotage it at every chance they get. One of the ways this is done is by trying to politicize the advisory board. And that gets awfully messy. In this case the early childhood administrator who felt threatened by the federal program has close allies on the board - including her husband.

Anyone who has worked in education programs, social service departments, or not-for-profit help agencies, knows about the politics and meanness of turf issues.

It just doesn't make sense to add state funded preschools and early childhood programs to the bureaucratic mess. If we are going to publicly fund early educational programs, they must be independent entities that operate

separately from the public schools. We cannot allow them to be swallowed by an out-of-control monster; we cannot afford to have most of the dollars going to administration, with little actually helping children and families.

Those of us who work closely with young children know the kind of learning that takes place before age 5 is very different from the learning that occurs during the traditional school years. Jean Piaget's work, along with Froebel, Erickson, Maria Montessori, and others, have convinced experts in the early childhood field of this central difference. We know young children must experience a vast array of concrete experiences with objects, materials, and people. Programs for this age child must utilize young children's curiosity, individuality, tremendous energy, and joy of social interaction, in their quest to learn. Young children learn in a comprehensive, integrative fashion; not by teaching separate, abstract subjects. Before the age of 6 a child must learn a great deal in a multitude of areas: cognitive, emotional, social, physical, language, moral and artistic.

We also know young children attend to, process, and store information in ways very different from children over 6.

Thus these children need a different kind of teaching; they need curricula, materials, activities, instruction and environments very different from traditional school programs. We have an obligation to provide these programs;

we must also work extremely hard to undo all the misinformation that books, product manufacturers, and public schools, tell parents about the needs of young children, and teach parents about the realities of children's growth and development.

Public school early childhood programs are usually downward extensions of the kindergarten program, which is itself a downward extension of first grade. Recently I worked with a parent concerned about her child's progress in an early childhood program. This program is part of the public schools. I took her concerns to an assistant principal, who happens to be a friend. He responded that the early childhood program was directed by each building principal, "who knows nothing about this age group --- and, besides, he doesn't have time to get involved with the program."

I am also aware of teachers in this same public school early childhood program who were placed in their position because the district needed to meet specific ethnic ratios in that school. These sincere, well intentioned teachers, knew nothing about this age group, had no specific training for early childhood education, and were given no inservice training by the district. I wonder how many teachers who are not specifically trained for the early childhood field will end up teaching young children - to meet ethnic ratios, tenure requirements, or other administrative mandates.

Most people who teach young children have degrees in elementary education - with a few early childhood classes added in, just in case they end up teaching young children. These are probably the best prepared teachers public schools will have teaching our young children. Many professionals in the early childhood field received their degrees at community colleges (2 year degrees) or liberal arts colleges (the old departments of Home Economics - now with names like the College of Human Ecology). These professionals are highly skilled in the fields of early childhood education, child development, psychology, and developmental theory. Yet they would not teach our young children in the public schools, because they are not eligible for state teacher certification. We would, in effect, screen out the best teachers.

Young children need different kinds of experiences from what they receive in preschools. Young children learn best in small groups, with lots of positive, adult attention. While this is true of all children - its even more important with young children. High risk children - especially those from homes that don't have stable adult direction and discipline - especially need lots of opportunity to develop natural, secure, positive relationships with adults in the classroom setting. A continual complaint of our public schools is class size. Even kindergartens have from 25 to 30 children in a class.

A central concern of mine is the negative effect of child care programs on children. A critical problem, which is difficult even for the very good programs to avoid, is the idea of group behavior. Do you encourage an inquisitive 5 year old to throw a stone in the pond to see its impact (a great science activity) if it will cause 20 stones to fly through the air? My own children have learned some very aggressive behaviors, clearly based on the need to get the attention of the one adult in the room of 20 children. Young children should have many opportunities for secure, uninterrupted interaction with adults. They should not have to continually compete with 20 other students for this attention.

Traditional early childhood programs have been able to have smaller classes, and more adults per children, for many reasons. Some state licensing authorities stipulate smaller ratios, depending on age. Many programs do an excellent job of using volunteers, parents, and student interns. Most can hire more adults because of the low salaries they pay.

While the low salaries for child care workers is not acceptable, the other methods used to keep ratios low might not work in public school programs. Teacher unions have not allowed volunteers to take over teachers duties in the classroom. Many public schools have a very poor record of encouraging, supporting and utilizing parent volunteers - especially parents of high-risk students. Public school

preschool and early childhood programs often do not meet state licensing requirements, nor do they have to.

Given these facts public school preschool and early childhood programs probably will be large collections of same age children, with one teacher, in a traditional classroom.

If, however, public funded early childhood programs are staffed by early childhood professionals with appropriate education, staffed at a ratio needed for young children, and paid according to the union scale in the local district (which these teachers will demand and deserve) the cost of these programs will be far higher than any advocate or politician has so far considered.

And they will use a curriculum driven by the Kindergarten entrance exam. Afterall they are preparing these children to enter Kindergarten, and then first grade. This curriculum will emphasize narrow skills, abstract academic concepts, repetition, and rote learning. It will de-emphasize social skill development, affective areas, risk taking, challenges and developing a joy of learning and information. It will not provide the broad, integrative, expansive foundation needed for further academic pursuits: it will not provide the very foundation high risk children must have to succeed later in their school experience. I will strongly argue high risk children often fail in schools not because of lack of specific academic skills, but because

they do not have the broad foundation - including appropriate social skills - needed to succeed in school.

Some states - including Colorado - are proposing to give state funds to the school district, then encouraging each district to contract with local child care programs - Head Starts, commercial child care centers, and other early childhood providers. These programs would provide the direct preschool and early childhood services to the high risk students, and be reimbursed by the local district.

On paper this sounds like a good proposal. But, based on the history of similar proposals, there are tremendous problems with this concept.

Those of us who have tried working with local districts are very frustrated with the process. Its like negotiating with individual European countries.

Child Find, and the new federal law for handicapped children - PL 99-457 -, requires local districts to work together with other child care providers. Yet the spotted success of Child Find, and the difficulty local Head Start's and other programs are having in developing working systems to serve handicapped children, illustrates how difficult this process is. Reasons include a bias toward the local district, because it holds the purse strings, a superiority by the district because, after all, "Head Start staff are not certified, so how can they know what these children need," a greed by the district to get all the money while expecting the community provider to provide the service.

turf issues and logistical problems. My Head Start program serves 5 different school districts. We have to work separately with each district - meeting their needs, bureaucracies, and regulations. Many Head Start programs nationally - especially those in rural areas, serve several school districts. Urban child care centers often have children from several school districts attending their child care and after school programs. Traditionally early childhood programs don't have the administrative support to develop these relationships, monitor them, and attend meetings at each school district. Often these districts are extremely unflexible when cooperative agreements are developed between the school and early childhood program. Teacher certification, curriculum entrance requirements, transportation, screening and diagnostic tests all must be considered in this process.

While some local school districts are very interested in working with local community based programs that serve young children, they will only do so if they cannot positively impact their own budgets with the money for these programs. Afterall, this is new money, and almost every district in this county is seeking any new dollars they can get their hands on. Thus the non-public school programs will get these state dollars by default. Also, since the local district controls these dollars (that's the way most of the legislation is written), it seems logical they will

dictate what the program will be like - including curriculum, and possibly teacher certification.

Many of the new public preschool programs - and existing program like Chapter I and programs for handicapped preschoolers - don't provide transportation. This is because the state reimburses each school for children served. But the state - at least Colorado - will only pay for students who must attend school. Thus local districts do not receive money for preschool and Kindergarten children.

Head Start programs have recognized that parents often cannot get their children to the program. In areas where this is difficult, the local Head Start program provides the transportation. Even urban elementary schools are often no longer really neighborhood schools. The distance from home to school is often quite far. Young children, of course, cannot be expected to walk.

High risk children are often the ones that need transportation. Their parents may not have reliable transportation; if they do, it usually is needed by the wage earner. Handicapped children, of course, often need specialized transportation. This lack of transportation poses a tremendous problem: the young children who most need a good foundation for future school success won't be able to access these publicly funded programs.

Then there is the issue of the harm poor programs can do to any children. I'm not going to argue about parent-

child bonding, or even the convincing research on Head Start. What I am arguing is that the public preschool programs I have observed are terrible: a large group of same-age high risk students taught inappropriate skills by a teacher with no background in early childhood development. These programs teach isolated academic skills, social conformity, competing with each other to get the teacher's attention, a me-first attitude, and a peer concept that we all later abhor in acolescent children teach some very negative things to children.

Many publicly funded early childhood programs are targeted at a special group of children - such as at risk. These children must be identified, through tests. Thus children at a very young age are identified as being different from their peers - and to them and their parents, as being inferior. There are many problems with this approach. We do not have reliable and valid instruments to accurately determine which children really meet the criteria of this special group. Growing evidence indicates teachers do not know how to give these tests without biasing the results against minority children. Many parents are very angry when their children are designated as inferior - both because this is an indictment of the parent, and because parents believe once their child receives this designation they will never be able to get out of school remedial programs. This automatically destroys the parent - school trust <u>required</u> to make these programs work.

Are we going to take our high-risk students, who we feel are not getting adequate preschool preparation at home, put them in a poor quality, inappropriate preschool program, and then track them through a subpar educational system? Are we guaranteeing high-risk preschoolers will become high-risk drop outs, then high-risk citizens? There is something frightening about a tracking system devised and controlled by the very system that has never been successful with poor and minority students.

A positive preschool and early childhood program for high-risk students must be totally autonomous of the local school system, must have a curriculum, teaching styles and environment that support the natural growth of this age child, and have a validity and importance on its own.

CHAPTER III

SCHOOL DEPENDENCY

Conservatives claim early childhood and preschool programs take parenting responsibilities away from the family - where it rightfully belongs - and place it in the hands of the state. While this position is extreme, and simplistic, it does have some merit. In many of my conversations with Head Start parents, they angrily say, "you should do this and this," and, "why don't you do this?" and, "why did you do so and so?" As I patiently listen to the parents a little tape goes through my head, "lady, why don't you do some of these things --- afterall, this is your child!" Yet when I suggest to parents things they might do to improve their child's home experiences, they accuse me of being a culturally insensitive "expert." Its obvious to me many parents who send their children to early childhood programs revoke parental responsibility, believing its the program's job to prepare their child for school.

The already funded and proposed public preschool programs are for high risk children. Many of these children come from homes where dependency on the system is a way of life. These children live in homes where the basics of food, shelter and health insurance are provided by the state. These children grow up in a culture of dependency.

The 15-year-old girl who lived with our family recently is the product of the American welfare system. She and I had many interesting discussions and confrontations. She

would set the thermostat at 80 degrees, get mad at me when I turned it down at night, leave all the lights on, and dry one item of clothing at a time in the electric dryer. When I finally argued with her that we couldn't afford this energy waste, she responded simply, "but we only paid $15-a-month for gas and electricity."

"How did you pay so little?" I asked in wonder. "Oh, welfare paid the rest," she responded automatically.

This young lady dressed in the latest MTV-music-video-clothes, and wore expensive Reebok sneakers. Whenever she earned money from her Dairy Queen job she spent it all on clothes and makeup. She had no idea - or concern - about what it cost us to have her live with our family.

We know the American welfare system doesn't work. We must make sure our education system doesn't make the same mistakes. We cannot afford to create a dependency system.

Will parents feel, 'the preschool will get my child ready for school, so I don't have to do anything?' Recently a Head Start parent from last year frustratingly said, "my child is failing Kindergarten. Its your fault - you should have taught her the basic skills to succeed in Kindergarten. You are not doing your job." A lively discussion followed inwhich I told her we never promise to prepare children for Kindergarten, we never promise a child who attends our program will automatically succeed in Kindergarten, we never sign a contract with a parent that their child will be totally prepared for public school. We do tell parents

their children will have experience that will help them when the enter school, they will be provided with medical and dental supports, and parents will be helped to provide what is best for their children.

But we don't want our parents to revoke their central responsibility to the education of their child. Many parents feel public schools have the total responsibility of educating their children. Thats one reason public schools are so unsuccessful - especially with the high risk population. What we should be doing is: one, convince parents that the child's family experience before he enters organized school is critical to the child's later school success; and, two, we must teach parents how to provide what their children need.

These are tremendously difficult tasks. No early childhood programs currently in use successfully achieve these objectives. Head Start has a strong parent involvement component, but federal law prevents local programs from requiring parents to become involved with activities that would increase their parenting skills; and the Head Start parent involvement model comes out of a 1960's philosophy, where parents believe they can control the content, policies and practices of the local program, but the local program cannot impact their home environments and parenting practices.

Yet the Head Start model comes closest of all existing models to understand the need to impact the home

environment. Public school preschool programs do not have the Head Start parent component. They are not a comprehensive program that address the total needs of the child, including medical, dental, social, cognitive, cultural and home environment. My own experience with local public schools had lead me to believe they really don't want to hear from parents, and greatly dislike parents questioning their 'expert' decisions. Work with my Head Start parents who become very frustrated when their children enter the local public school, confirms this opinion.

I wonder whether state dollars used to fund these programs might be better spent helping parents understand their parental responsibilities. Maybe fund a Sesame Street TV program for parents; require several parenting classes, funded by the state, for graduation from high school, or require parenting classes before a marriage license is issued. Maybe the state could fund hospitals to provide parenting classes as part of the hospital regime parents must go through when having a baby.

Parents who are convicted of child neglect or abuse are required to take parenting classes. Could we not require all parents who receive public assistance to take parenting classes? This, I argue, would be better use of these public dollars.

Providing, or helping to provide, quality child care for eight hours-a-day would be more effective use of public dollars than funding a part-day preschool program. This

would provide the children with social interaction, consistent adult guidance, and lots of opportunity to experiment, risk, and try new materials and experiences. It would also enable their parents to upgrade the family's quality of life through education, training or a job.

At the least any publicly funded preschool program should require parents to attend classes, have home visits, and implement the ideas provided by the home visitor.

We must, somehow, teach parents that having children involves more than conception. We must teach them to have books in their homes, to read to their children every day, to have lots of two-way conversations, to discipline in consistent, non-punitive ways, to allow manipulation and experimentation with materials, to allow messy play in water, dramatic play with grandpa's old clothes, and messing around in the back yard. And we must insist they control the TV and limit the amount of time their children watch. Having a child spend 3 1/2 hours a day, for nine months, in a structured, public, preschool program, will never substitute for a full, supportive, rich home environment. It might even be counter productive, with the parent saying "he's had his learning for the day, I'll just put him in front of the TV while I talk to my friends on the phone."

Don't get me wrong. I'm <u>not</u> against a quality, preschool and early childhood programs. I have been a Head Start director for 5 years; involved with the program for over 10. I'm also a product of infant and early childhood

programs. But we must establish a system where the family is ultimately responsible for the child's education and development. A good early childhood program must build parent responsibility, must improve the family's ability to provide for the child's needs - including her educational needs.

A public early childhood program for high risk children is a quick fix that won't work. Its also a solution that will increase the sense of dependency these parents - and later their children - will develop on an external parental system. This dependency will totally destroy individual initiative and responsibility. It will create an attitude of "the program failed me and my child," and it will create an entire generation of children who believe, "they owe me."

Is this effective use of our tax dollars?

CHAPTER IV

ENCOURAGING KINDERGARTENS TO SCREEN OUT FIVE-YEAR-OLDS

Keeping five-year-olds out of Kindergarten has become a national problem. Public schools claim certain children just are not developmentally ready for their Kindergarten instruction. Confounding this issue is the growing acceptance of testing children to enter 1st grade (as in the state of Georgia). Obviously, the logic goes, if a child may flunk Kindergarten, we must make sure the child has a fair chance to succeed. Thus we must know if he is ready.

Screening children for Kindergarten is not a new idea. For years Kindergarten teachers have claimed children entering their programs must know their colors, numbers, letter sounds, how to write their names, and remember their phone numbers. Who gave these teachers the skill and authority to set these criteria is open to question. Many of us in the preschool field are continually pressured by the local Kindergartens to design our curriculums to make sure children entering their program have these specific skills. Recently a parent told me my program had failed because her child did not have the skills the Kindergarten teacher wanted. "Head Start should teach these skills before your child comes here. Head Start has failed you." said the teacher.

Requiring all five-year-olds who enter Kindergarten to be at the same level in all developmental and skill areas comes from the assumption the educational process can only

work if those who enter it, enter at the same place, and then move through the system, in the same step by step fashion. It also assumes that teaching somehow must occur in homogenous groups of same age and same development children.

This is an archaic view of education that is not supported by any solid research or theory. It also suggests schools are not supportive, human environments that encourage individuals to develop at their own pace, and in different areas. We know some children develop quicker in intellectual skills, while their social skills take longer; some children are sophisticated physically, while their emotional development lags behind. Development is not a unified, constant sequential process. Its erratic and unpredictable.

Maybe public school's stress on entrance levels is an admission of failure. Maybe they do such a poor job while they have the children that they want to make sure most of the work is done before the child enters school.

The new public preschool and early childhood programs will encourage kindergarten entrance requirements. These schools will claim that any child who does not meet the entrance requirements is automatically at risk, and therefore eligible for their preschool program. Furthermore, programs will have an easy method to target students for their preschools.

Who will determine the preschool curriculum? The logic should be the public Kindergarten. After all we must get these children ready for the Kindergarten entrance requirements. So the curriculum will contain lessons on colors, counting, writing your name, knowing alphabet sounds, and other very specific academic skills.

Is this what we should be teaching high risk children? I don't think so. Many of these children are not ready to learn this kind of very specific, isolated information. Let us remember the underlying reason for these programs is that high risk children miss certain developmental activities that non high risk children have. These activities have to do with play, language stimulation, lots of positive one to one adult-child interaction, and experimenting with ideas, materials, roles and books. We don't say these children are high risk because they can't count, don't know their letter sounds, and don't know their colors

So a curriculum for low income preschoolers should not be defined by the Kindergarten entrance requirements.

If we continue to make Kindergarten entrance requirements so difficult and unrealistic a significant number of pupils cannot enter the program, we are essentially supporting a program that does not meet the needs of the typical five-year-old. Surely a good Kindergarten program should be based on the needs of all five-year-olds. To do otherwise is to create a system that regards a significant number of children as failures, and

creates a false and unrealistic sense of the skills and maturation of the average five-year-old.

We should not think in terms of Kindergarten readiness; we should make sure the public Kindergarten is ready for the child.

Another result of making the public Kindergarten and preschool curriculums too abstract, isolated, and disconnected from what the child really needs, is an increase in dropout rates. One reason children drop out of public school is because they get turned off from the natural process of learning, discovery and insight. Learning activities are too disconnected from the natural motivation to know, order, master, gain competence, and self reliance. Programs that don't acknowledge this natural desire to learn, by making children learn content that is developmentally inappropriate, and making them learn in ways that are not consistent with their natural style, will turn the children off.

Lets make no mistake about children who drop out. They are dropping out of a system, that, for many reasons, is not meeting their needs. Does it make sense to extend that very system for another year? Or will this just mean the students will drop out of school one year earlier?

American is a highly technological society that requires its citizens to be comfortable with abstract symbols and processes. Professions that enable a person to

find economic success in this society require a high degree of abstract manipulation and processing.

We know development and acquisition of sophisticated abstract concepts and skills is built on a social foundation a vast variety of concrete experiences. Children must have so many of these real, concrete experiences. They are forced to develop abstract rules about these experiences. It is, however, impossible to comprehend abstract rules without the real experiences. Thus all young children must be exposed to a vast array of concrete experiences.

Many of the students who drop out of high school do not have the basic understanding of abstract concepts. They have difficulty with the past and future; they cannot imagine what it is like being in someone elses shoes; they have problems with quantities, ideas, and concepts they have never experienced first hand.

The immediacy of our culture - especially TV - and the immediate gratification this culture provides - reinforces this individual, personal experience concept. To know the importance of staying in school for future success, understand how another person feels, develop moral behavior, and conceive of complex symbols and relationships for science, math and language, requires a person to have developed sophisticated processes through their early experience.

The high risk students who drop out of school have not become abstract - processing citizens of this highly

technological society. They are more like members of small, isolated, self-sustained villages in the mountains of a third world country.

Will highly structured, public school type preschools help these students develop this abstract sophistication?

No!

What these children need is a program that encourages dramatic play, experimentation, lots of language, using a variety of materials in varying ways, and lots and lots of concrete experiences. They need a curriculum that is not skill and end product oriented. They need a curriculum that encourages process, integration of academic skills in real hands on experiences, and exposure to a wider world.

Surely, you might suggest, public schools can provide this kind of program for high risk four-year-olds. I don't have your faith in the system. With the popularity of testing children every other day, the increased interest in merit pay for teachers, and the above mentioned need to prepare children to enter the public Kindergarten , I don't believe public schools can provide the needed programs. Public schools have not been able to demonstrate they understand the radically different developmental needs of children under five. More critically, they have shown a total inability to tailor their programs to the needs of any of their students, especially the average Kindergartener. Their history suggests forcing high risk preschoolers to adapt to meet the school's idea of a good program.

What public schools should be doing is eliminating their entry requirements for Kindergarten. They should take any child who is the legal age, and create a program that adapts to the needs of the individual child. An individualized plan for each child can then be developed to help each child grow at that child's optimum level.

Delegating Kindergarteners who don't meet some arbitrary entrance requirements into a public preschool will not benefit the child, society, or the drop out rate.

CHAPTER V

Use of Public School Buildings For Early Childhood Programs

If public schools run preschool and early childhood programs they will use existing public school facilities. Most city school districts have experienced a loss of students; they have lots of space available. However, there are some tremendous problems associated with serving young high risk students in existing city school buildings. These problems include fire and safety concerns; lack of adequate playgrounds; and classrooms, steps, bathrooms, etc., all designed for older, bigger, more mature students. A second area of concern when using existing public school facilities is positive, effective parent communication and involvement. Many schools are no longer in the child's neighborhood and are difficult for parents to visit often - especially working parents; ,many schools are so big and impersonal parents are too intimidated to enter; and parents of high risk students often do not trust schools because of their negative past experience with public schools.

Elementary school buildings just are not soft, kind, supportive, secure environments for 2, 3 and 4-year-olds. They don't encourage little bodies to fall, climb, hang on ropes, make a mess, slide, roll, sit by yourself, race holding your friend's hand, and jump as far as you dare. They have long, straight corridors with sterile walls and high ceilings; they have huge stairs, with railings for

enough apart to trap a little head; they have giant classrooms and noisy cafeterias.

I've been in many Head Start programs in renovated school buildings. These programs make a valiant effort to remodel the buildings for the use of younger children: build little steps up to the sinks and water fountains, attach railings on stairs, and construct barriers around unsafe areas. But the toilets are still too high, the steep adult stairs dangerous, the big rooms oppressive, and the entire building a fire trap. The building has such an adult feeling - adult sizes, order, structure, materials, ratios and heights.

And the playgrounds are disasters. Fifteen foot high slides on asphalt. Huge swings that would KO a small child if they happened to get in the way. No grass. No trees. No sand boxes. No shade. No equipment for dramatic play, development of small bodies, trike paths and tunnels. And often no immediate access to the building: a bathroom, first aid kit, phone, changing table, etc.

Preschools and early childhood programs housed in public school facilities do not have to meet state licensing requirement, because they are considered academic school programs, not child care. Politically, its very difficult for one public agency to tell another "what they can/cannot do." These state licensing requirements provide some basic quality assurance in many areas, including playgrounds, child-teacher ratios, and the number of children to be

served in a given space. To be able to receive this license, the facility must meet basic zoning, fire, building, and health and safety regulations. While these differ within local jurisdictions, they do provide basic protection for our children.

Many elementary schools are inadequate for the population they were originally designed to serve. Many of these buildings are old, have poor heating and plumbing, have no classroom materials, and provide totally inadequate playgrounds for school age children. These buildings cannot adequately provide for the needs of 2, 3 and 4-year-olds. This is an age where children learn by interacting with their environment. They must be in an environment that is flexible, responsive, interactive, kind, child-sized, and changeable. Its also an age where play - both indoor and outdoor - is critical to normal growth and development. Play requires safe, challenging, accessible age appropriate materials, toys and equipment. While the learning environment is important for all age groups, it is most critical for this age. Safety, responsiveness, security and variety are absolutely essential. Young children must explore, experiment, fall, climb, discover, challenge and construct.

Yet we are proposing to house high risk young children - often from unsafe, insecure, unresponsive home environments - in huge classrooms with 10 foot ceilings, and on playgrounds with 15 foot slides and acres of asphalt.

Elementary schools are just too large and impersonal for little children. The scale is too large. The feeling is overwhelming, oppressive, and dominated by brick and concrete. Young children need a small, intimate environment, a place they can call their own, a comfortable, familiar place where they fit in. They need easy access to the bathroom when they need to go; they need a sink and faucet in the classroom to wash paint, clay or glue from their hands; they need spaces where they can hide and get away for a while. They need play environments they can easily use many times during the day. Young children must have an environment that responds to their needs, not one that they must adapt to. They also need easy access to the outdoors, a short walk to their parent's car or home, a quick snack when they are hungry.

Long corridors, bathrooms a distance from the classroom, large cafeterias, and playgrounds that can only be used when others are not using them, encourage the traditional public school phenomena of children parading in single file, waiting till 20 other children finish peeing, and being herded around like cattle by an adult. This is inappropriate for 8-year-olds; its totally unacceptable for 2 to 5-year-olds.

These problems of inappropriate scale, oppression, safety and access even more extreme when we consider infant care. Changing tables, nap times, refrigerated bottles, sick infants and extreme health concerns makes infant care

in public school buildings a very expensive proposition. Radical renovations would have to be made to meet existing fire codes, let alone making the building intimate, warm, responsive, and safe.

Another problem with scale, unresponsiveness, and inappropriate space usage is that these children and their parents will feel like second class citizens, intruding on a space, schedules and priorities dictated by older children and their needs.

The large, impersonal school buildings are also intimidating to many parents, as is the impersonal public school bureaucracy. Parents of high risk students are often alienated from society, and from the institutions of society. Schools present a system that has failed them; a system unresponsive to their needs and concerns. Why should they now believe this system is good for their children?

Parents of young children need a center that is small, accessible, preferably close to their home or work. It must be small enough so they can get to know many of the parents. It must be personal enough so they can talk to the teacher about Timmy's nightmares. It must be responsive enough so a parent can question the director about a policy she doesn't understand, without getting the response, "I don't know, that's just their policy," or "I don t know - call central administration," or "No, if I do it for you, we'll have to do it for everybody!" And accessible enough so a parent can stroll over for coffee, zip in on the way to work to chat

with staff and check on her child; or pick up the phone and check on her child's well-being, without checking at the office. Without getting permission. Without feeling she is interrupting a critically important activity. Without parking 5 blocks away and walking down a mile of corridors - past the principal, counselors, psychologists, parents, classrooms of older classroom, and the speech specialists.

Yet parent involvement is central to the success of any early childhood program. It has been the backbone of Head Start's success, and the central idea that drives good preschool and early childhood programs. Because so much of a young child's early experiences occur at home, its essential home and school work together as a partnership. There must be trust, communication and honesty between the parent and program. A parent must be able to pick up the phone at any time to clarify an issue, ask a question, or check on their child. The provider needs to be able to talk to the parent about concerns she might have about a child, without the parent feeling threatened.

The partnership must presume both the home and the program are important to the child's development. The child must be central to this partnership. Any disagreements between the home and center should be resolved with the child's best interest in mind. These influences on the child must work together, for the child to have any real success.

Private child care providers know this. Head Start programs have a 20 year-history of supporting this philosophy. But public schools have a poor track record in this area.

Many public school teachers and administrators see active parent involvement as a direct threat, as a challenge to their control, as a questioning of their expert advise and education. They sincerely believe a child and his family should adapt and change to fit the school's curriculum, tests, rules, definitions of success and hidden agendas. They don't want to have to address parent needs; they don't believe time, energy and money are needed to communicate to parents why they are doing what they are doing. Parents should accept what schools do by faith. The school is not responsive to the needs of the child and her family. After all, the school knows what's best for everyone's children. My childrens schools recently decided against protestations from many parents, to put 6th grade children in middle school, "because research shows us this is best for your children." One of my daughters had a very successful 1st grade experience. Her teacher was assigned to then teach the second grade so we requested our daughter be in her class. The principal said "no", she would not, however, tell us the reason.

If public schools have a bad track record with parent involvement, their record with parents of high risk children is terrible! These parents don't join PTAs, accountability

committees, or parent sponsored activities. They don't feel they are wanted; they don't believe the school will listen to their concerns and make the necessary changes. Any discussions of increasing academic and skill levels of minority students and of reducing drop out rates, always come back to the issue of getting these parents involved in the schools. Public schools have not been able to solve this problem.

Why do we expect them to have positive parent involvement of parents in public school early childhood programs for high risk children? I hope we are not suggesting an early childhood program can have a positive impact without good parent involvement, because it can't!

One of the reasons small, independent child care providers listen to parents and respond to their wishes and concerns, is because an upset parent will remove her child. And her financial support for the business. This system allows parents to select programs that meet their needs - in location, philosophy curriculum and service. It also guarantees a marketplace that is responsive to parents child care needs, and necessitates programs stay in constant communication with their parents.

With my own children I have changed child care because they insisted on allowing my child to watch TV; because my daughter didn't receive the kind of attention I felt she needed, and because we moved.

Public school programs are not beholden to this kind of economic pressure. Parents who have fought just to have a child removed from a classroom with a bad teacher, or placed in a classroom that has a structure more consistent with the child's learning needs, know how impossible public schools are to influence. They don't seem to care about the child's or parent's needs at all. Parents of special needs children have often had even more trouble getting the needed services for their children. If you don't like the public preschool program your child is assigned to, you can pull your child out. Period. Poor people and parents of high risk children will not have choices in placing their children.

And the public school early childhood programs will not have to be responsive to the needs and wishes of these parents.

Clearly one of the problems of providing public school preschools and early childhood programs is the buildings that will be used. These buildings are just not well suited for serving young children. Their size, location, and inaccessibility will also inhibit needed parent input in these programs. This needed parent-program partnership will be further jeopardized by the public school's historic inability to work effectively with parents - especially minority and low income parents.

CHAPTER VI

MISUSE OF CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

Over the years a cadre of professionals, parents, politicians and business people have advocated quality child care for parents in need of these programs. Child care has been viewed by these people as a way to enable parents to access training opportunities, a way for a family to increase the quality of their lives, and a rich early experience for children who otherwise would be denied a positive start in life. We have also viewed quality care as one of the central components in a woman's attempt to move off welfare. Head Start, corporate child care, and programs designed to increase the quality and availability of quality care have all been seen as genuine attempts to increase the quality of life for children and their parents, and to increase the choices of low income and working parents.

We know quality care is difficult to find. We know young families often cannot afford quality care - especially if one parent is in training, or if the family is dysfunctional: unemployed on drugs, etc. Many single parent homes see child care as their number one concern. And all parents need time away from their children - to relax and reduce the pressures of parenthood. Major components of Head Start are designed to strengthen the family, provide parents with resources in the community that will help them improve the quality of family life, and help the individual parent's growth. Other child care efforts have been

designed to strengthen existing functional families, and intervene in dysfunctional families. These programs intended to give parents information to help them be better parents, provide quality care when needed, and enable parents to go back to school or enter the workforce. And they all recognized the critical role of the parent in raising their children; the importance of assisting parents in accepting and supporting this responsibility.

It is, then, quite a shock to realize our support of quality child care and preschool programs is producing policies and programs that reduce parent freedoms and force low income children into poor quality, state supported programs. Our efforts are, in effect, producing some very negative results. The acceptance of child care for children below age 5 has lead to some disturbing trends: forcing mothers of young children to work - while placing their young children in subpar child care programs; granting smaller child support payments to divorcing women with young children, because, afterall, they can and should work. It has even contributed to the absurd notion that women must work outside the home to be successful and fulfilled.

We must examine very carefully the overall purpose of publicly funded early childhood programs. We must then make sure the proposed and funded programs clearly meet those purposes. Is our reason for publicly funding early childhood programs to give high risk students a better chance at succeeding in school? If it is, then we must fund

the best programs money, research and theory can provide. Or is our real purpose for these programs to be care-taker for poor children, so we can make their parents work? If so - our programs, policies, and quality will be different. And conscientious professionals will object to them. I don't believe these hard decisions have been made. I don't believe publicly funded programs should be low quality holding tanks for poor children. I don't believe women should be forced to leave their children under someone else's care, if they want to stay with them.

The new workfare legislation will not allow poor mothers to stay home and raise their children. We are taking this choice away from them. Middle-class parents will be able to choose whether or not one parent should stay home with the children; they can also choose the quality and kind of program their child will attend.

There is no question in my mind most of the programs workfare parents will be required to use will be poor quality programs. They will lack the kind of quality middle-class parents insist on, because parents will not be able to choose the program they wish; because the administrators of the program will know what's best for these 'bad' families; and because these programs will not be clear of their true objective. While I believe the true objective for these programs should be quality, developmentally appropriate care for young children. Other objectives have already entered the discussion: getting

mothers off welfare, and providing a training ground for child care workers. This country's history with segregated schools shows what happens to the quality of a social program when it is targeted at one group or class of people. Programs for high-risk young students or welfare children are segregated programs.

I run a small child care program for children whose parents attend a training program for low-income adults. My program is a high quality program that my 3-year-old daughter has attended on several occasions. When I proposed selling slots in my program to county social service employees, there was tremendous concern on their part. How could a program that serves low-income clients be good enough for professionals' children? These social services employees place AFDC children in local programs all the time. They know how poor many of these programs are. They also know few parents can choose a better program because the social workers are unwilling to let them change. Besides, most programs that serve welfare client's children are pretty bad, because the state does not pay enough in reimbursement to fund a good program, and because there are so few slots available. Programs that serve these children whose cost is reimbursed by the state, generally subsidize these slots by charging higher fees from paying children, or they are poor quality programs that cost very little to operate. Interestingly none of the current legislation

directed at providing services for young children has suggested increasing these reimbursement levels.

We have created a child care system where low-income children receive low quality child care. We are now going to force parents to place their children in these state subsidized, mediocre programs - segregated programs that lack accountability, competition, qualified staff and a cadre of educated parents who will monitor program quality.

What does this discussion have to do with public school early childhood and preschool programs? I have two general concerns. Whenever I begin to discuss this issue with other early childhood professionals throughout the country, their response is always the same: lets not discuss issues of quality and appropriate child care; lets just be grateful politicians are finally giving us some money! As I have already pointed out, just supporting child care is not good enough. Infact it can backfire, and we end up supporting low quality, segregated early childhood programs. It is not too far fetched to predict public school programs might well become the programs workfare parents are required to use. The logic is simple: we have created tax supported programs for high-risk students using our public schools, lets now expand that program to serve our workfare clients. Do we want to support a program that forces mothers to give up their children to the state everyday?

We should be spending tax money to teach both parents the critical responsibility they have - and will have

throughout their child's education - for the developmental of their children. It seems to me forcing a parent to leave their child at a designated program everyday, so the parent can participate in workfare, is going to establish the concept that the state, not the parent, is responsible for raising children. The message to the poor parent is clear: the state will educate and raise my child because I am incapable of doing so myself.

We know successful school experiences are based on family support. Research after research demonstrates schools cannot be successful without parent support - without the parent believing in their impact on their child's school success. Yet workfare programs that force parents to place their child in a state subsidized system teach parents they have no positive impact on their child. For schools to be involved in these kinds of programs seems counter productive.

Many professionals and politicians who support school based early childhood programs point to Head Start's success, especially the strong parent involvement component. They argue school based programs will teach parents about responsibility to their children and their children's education. Unfortunately many of these programs are not funded at the level needed to provide these parent services. Involving parents is complex and expensive. Also public schools do not have a good track record of working with parents, and they have not shown an interest or ability in

improving that record. Logic would suggest public schools consult with local and national Head Start programs, and other early childhood programs that have demonstrated success working with parents, to improve parent involvement, especially with low-income parents. Ironically, most local Head Start programs have very poor - often negative - relationships with the local school districts, who feel Head Start is unjustly competing in their arena, and who feel far superior to the local Head Start program. Nationally ACYF (Administration for Children, Youth and Families - the federal program that oversees Head Start) don't even talk to officials of the Department of Education. The new federal handicap legislation - 99-457 - which totally ignores Head Start's ability and track record in serving handicapped children - is the most recent example of this lack of communication.

While the institutionalization of child care has made workfare an acceptable policy, and has greatly increased the choices of women to re-enter the workplace, or complete needed training and education, it is also reducing the choices and freedoms of many women. Professional women are lead to believe the only way they can compete in the workplace is to place their child in child care, and re-enter the workplace. Modern women have been sold the argument that motherhood is an unworthy occupation, and that they must work outside the home to be successful and fulfilled. Lawyers are successfully arguing that a

divorcing woman who has marketable skills should place her children in full-day child care and enter the workforce. She does not have the choice to stay home and raise her own children. It is argued the father of these children should not have to support his ex-wife's wish to stay at home, even if she believes this is the best way to provide for the care and early education of her children.

So the availability and acceptance of child care programs is reducing some people's choices. While I have always been an avid supporter of quality child care, and of women having the right to make education and career choices, I am also a strong believer in the family unit, and the right of one parent to stay home, if that is his or her choice. We must support the concept of the parents' right and responsibility to raise their own children, with quality child care provided for parents who choose to use it. When child care is mandated - either for low-income workfare parents or middle-income mothers - we have shifted the responsibility of raising our young children from the family to the state. And that, I believe, is dangerous.

I also wonder how far this trend will go. Will credit companies insist a mother of a family in temporary financial trouble go to work? Will the tax laws be revised to the point they will significantly punish a parent who chooses to stay home to raise her children? Will a parent who chooses to stay home be considered by society abnormal, lazy, and even unacceptable?

Of course parents should be able to enter the workplace, and find quality, affordable, reliable care for their children while at work. But a parent should also be able to stay at home to raise his or her children as the family believes. Ironically, as state subsidized child care and preschool programs are gaining popularity, states are recognizing the right of parents to teach their school age children at home, and home schooling is gaining tremendously in popularity. A central reason for home schooling is the belief that the home is the best place to educate your child. Equally convincing a reason is a dislike of the education public schools provide. Obviously home schooling is not a viable option for single parents, and poor parents; they simply don't have that choice, for obvious reasons. Are we willing to admit the same lack of choice for single and poor parents when it comes to infant and child care: they do not have the choice to raise their own children at home?

CHAPTER VII

THE IDEAL CHILD CARE PROGRAM

Child care for a large percentage of our children under six, and for older children before and after school, will be a fact of life for this society for years to come. Finding the best solution for this need involves many issues central to the American system: a history of care for our children; family rights v. societal responsibilities; equality in everything, including education; equal access to the system, the right of individual businesses to compete and make money, and the health and welfare of our youngest children.

What is the best way to take care of our children, and prepare them for an equal start in public schools? I don't believe there is one best way. I believe we must not look for a monolithic, public service system like the public schools. But I do believe there are guide posts we should use, and positive examples that can show us the way.

Many discussions about infant and child care end with the statement "we really don't know the impact of these programs, because they are so new." This, of course, is not true. Child care programs in Russia and China have existed for years. The Israeli kibbutzims have a forty-year history of institutional child care. These programs have been studied by students of the field, and have provided insight into the issue. My model for good infant and early childhood programs is the one developed by the religious communities of the Society of Brothers, over fifty years

ago. As a product of these programs, I have a special interest in them; but I also feel they can provide us with some answers to the issues of quality care.

In each community of the Society of Brothers - 150 to 350 families and single people living together - there is a Children's House. This is their child care center. Located near the center of the community, and away from motorized traffic and noise, this building is surrounded by grass and trees, and asphalt pathways descend on it in star-like fashion. Each Children's House is designed, or remodelled by the Society's architects, with tremendous input by those who are responsible for caring for the children. With clear tile floors, a modern food preparation hub, bright walls, and hand crafted woodwork, this building conveys a financial commitment to children. Its tidy lockers for each child; expansive, well equipped rooms; large protected outdoor area, and colorful pictures on the wall express a care and knowledge about child care. Handicapped wooden toys and equipment - built by the children's fathers - fill each room.

When you visit one of these Children's Houses you will see the infants in their individual cribs, on the floor mat trying to crawl, or in the arms of a rocking grandma. The toddlers might be in their room playing with the toys or listening to a story. But they might also be on a horse or buggy ride through the community, or visiting with parents at a place of work. The grounds of the community are an

extended Children's House: trails through the woods; swimming in the pool; riding trikes from home to home; and visiting the community doctor and dentist.

The children help daddy pull carrots in the communal garden; they visit grandpa at the factory snack-time and eat with him; they sing a joyful song to an older 'senior' who is sick. Many of these children also see their parents, grandparents or sisters (one aspect I don't support is the sexist nature of child care in the Society) in the Children's House as well, caring for them or other children.

Other members of the community also visit the Children's House to sing songs, read stories, tell the children about interesting experiences, and show arts and crafts from other countries. On regular occasions young children are matched with a big brother or sister from the community's school to engage in special, one-to-one activities.

Workers in the Children's Houses do not get paid. No-one in the communities of the Society of Brothers does. Which means child care providers have equal status and security to all others in the community. Each member of the society receives food, clothing, shelter and health care. There are many adults to take care of the children; groups are small.

Children, from age six weeks old, attend this Children's House for a period of time every day (sometimes even Sundays). They move through their age group, into

preschool, Kindergarten, and then school. The infant and early childhood curriculum includes singing, play, drama, storytelling, manipulatives, gross motor play and an introduction to languages and instruments. Academic skills are de-emphasized: social skills and an appreciation and fascination of the complexity and wonder of nature is stressed. Respect of adults and parents is also taught.

While this society obviously believes the care and welfare of the children is a societal responsibility to be taken very seriously - also with labor and financial commitments - they believe the education and development of each child is ultimately the responsibility of each family. Continually they remind the family of this responsibility; they also have continual formal and informal communication with parents about their children's progress.

Clearly this community - without the obvious problems of wages, insurance, liability, uncooperative parents, etc. can do many things that providers in the 'real world' cannot do.

But they do have a model that provides a basis - and point of departure for a discussion on what characteristics quality care should include.

Part of the Community. In the communities of the Society of Brothers children - while at the Children's House - are still an integral part of every aspect of the community. They show up at the workplace, communal meals, and meetings; they participate in community celebrations;

they are visited by teenage groups, parents, and grandparents. They help harvest the corn; they visit the factory where their parents work; and they take flowers to the old and sick. We must avoid the obvious temptation of segregating our youngest citizens from the ongoing life of our communities. We must not place children for eight hours-a-day in rooms away from the community, away from the need of cultural transmission to our next generation.

Efforts must be made to continually expose young children to the ongoing community life. Field trips, visits to the center by all sorts of colorful community characters, and use of community facilities - libraries, community centers, parks, shopping centers, churches, schools, etc., must occur on a continual basis. We must also insist these facilities do not force out our young children - through arbitrary age, time, and other barriers ("you can only come in with your parents"). Encouraging parents, grandparents, and community people to volunteer in the program (through real incentives like reduced tuition or time off-work to volunteer) will help keep these programs part of the rich fabric of the community.

The purpose of child care programs should never be to remove young children from the community and society. The temptation to do this is extremely dangerous. Infact, because of distance, size of buildings, zoning requirements, and our society's apparent need to separate, rather than include people, this tendency is difficult to prevent.

Financial Commitment. There is no question quality child care cost far more than any of us is willing to consider. Current legislation does not recognize the high cost of quality care. This high cost is a result of these needs: safe, secure, well designed buildings that are relatively small and located near the parents worksite or home; well trained providers whose salary provides financial security; small classes with many adults in each class.

Clearly programs for young children must be in facilities that meet all local and state codes and licenses. They must also be designed on a small, intimate scale, be flexible, and allow for children to be messy, rough, adventuresome and creative. These buildings need adequate outdoor environments especially designed for young children, ultimate safety from traffic, noise and pollution, and areas for staff and parents.

Child care providers need to be well trained in child development (but not state teacher certification, please!), need to have a livable wage and benefits, and need time off regularly to avoid stress. Young children require small teacher-child ratios. While having adults in the center who are in training - OJT slots, CDA, workfare mothers, etc., is acceptable. The majority of adults must be permanent, trained professionals. Ideally these adults would range from recently graduated high school students, to Seniors, and include many men. These professionals must believe in the abilities and worth of high-risk students, they must

know these children should not be taught academics and isolated skills, facts, or things to memorize. These teachers must be secure, supportive individuals who are comfortable with young children making a mess, making mistakes, and not knowing adult moral codes. These teachers cannot be dogmatic, authoritarian, or moralistic.

Multigrade groupings. Children should be in programs that have older and younger children in them. Homogeneous age-ability grouping is a very poor way of grouping children. One of the premises of the free school and alternative school movement of the 1960's was the idea children learn from those who are older, and also learn by teaching younger children. Naturally families provide for vertical age groupings - and it would seem this is a natural structure that facilitates learning. Interesting the only time we insist on age grouping is during the public school years - probably purely for management reasons. Many gifted programs today are using multi-grade learning units, because they recognized the need for children to move from challenging, difficult situations, to comfortable, no stress interaction.

Developmental learning theory (in all areas - cognitive, moral, social and physical) requires a student to be exposed to stages above his own, and to move to that stage. Thus the child needs to be around more advanced students. Students who are one or more stages ahead will help the other students move up. Students must also be

allowed to practice their newly developed skills on younger, less advanced students. Maybe if we break down like-age grouping in traditional schools we might weaken the tremendous power of peer groups, and the American phenomena of all children the same age having to dress the same, think the same, eat the same, and look the same.

I'm not sure how you mix preschool children with older children, but it must be done. Maybe children who have older siblings can have a role in the program; certainly Kindergarten children who attend a half-day program can attend the child care program for the rest of the day. Younger children should also attend.

Preschool or Child Care. We should place our emphasis on full day child care programs that enable the parents to choose work or complete their training or education. Pre-school curriculum concepts should exist within these child care programs, while the experiences, activities and curricula for all the children should be stimulating , age appropriate, and covering all developmental areas: physical, social, emotional, moral, and social. These programs must be near the parent's home, place of work, or school. They must be easy to access and encourage parents to drop in at any time.

Quality programs must not segregate students by race, ethnic group, class, or any single category (high risk, handicapped, delayed, etc.) We must not use public funds to support segregated programs for young children. One way to

encourage integration is to sell vouchers or slots, for high-risk students, to existing programs that serve middle class students. Another is to provide direct government subsidies to programs that provide a certain mix of students.

Curriculum. Clearly these programs should not emphasize academic preparation. High-risk children do not have the foundation onwhich to build academic skills. Early childhood educators must continue to develop a list of skills and concepts needed by all students before they are exposed to these specific academic tasks. Recently we have learned a great deal in this area - but we still have a way to go. We also must learn the best ways to develop these skills and concepts.

We do know these children need a secure, supportive environment inwhich they can experiment, risk, play, challenge, theorize and push their conceptual frontiers. They need educated teachers who can help them think, who can extend their learning experience, and who can teach them how to order, organize, categorize and observe the real world. These children need lots of social opportunities where they can learn appropriate social skills; they need to be in situations where they can develop through the various morale stages, and they need to learn that learning is fun, and that they can be good at it. The curriculum must be a self-contained document that is not influenced by the local public, private or church school.

Critically this early childhood and pre-school experience must be one of success. Testing of young children has become very popular. This is done to identify children for gifted programs, for the federal Child Find legislation, and for high-risk categories. Most of this testing is totally unreliable - both because the tests are not normed for the correct population, and because teachers do not know how to give tests. We must seriously look at the way we are using these tests. They cannot be used to place children in categories they cannot escape for the rest of their school life.

Parent Involvement. And parent involvement must occur. I suggest any parent who receives government help to send their child to a program be required to take parenting classes, and otherwise be involved with the education of their child. The program will also encourage parents to observe their child at any time, take their child to lunch or some other activity, and discuss with the teacher or director any concern of the parent.

For positive parent communication and involvement to take place, I believe the program must be relatively small, and each center, even if part of a large chain or community organization (United Way, etc.) must have a degree of independence and autonomy.

Parents of high-risk students must be able to select the program they want, based on its location, program, and other factors the parents feels important.

While all programs that provide child care must be responsive to the individual needs of each family - from not wanting a child to take a nap to responding to individual dietary and religious needs - the programs cannot adjust to parent requests that are developmentally unsound, illegal, or unethical. For example, a parent who uses corporal punishment at home cannot expect the program to use this punishment method at the center; a parent who has not contact with black people cannot request her child not be with a black teacher or not to be with black students.

How is this done? Frequent communication - both from the parent to the center, and center to the parent is the first step. It also requires the center to believe in responding to individual needs, and to admit they don't have all the answers. If they communicate to the parent: "we know whats right for your kid, and you don't", the parent will leave the raising of their child to the center. And thats the last thing we need!

Quality child care and early childhood programs must be part of our effort to improve the early experiences of high-risk children. They must be complete quality programs with components based on the best available research and information. We do know what constitutes quality child care, and we owe it to all our children to provide this care.

CHAPTER VIII

SOLUTIONS/CONCLUSION

High-risk young children in this country are in need of assistance and a national effort to prepare them for a better chance of school success. The nation should address this need with a three pronged attack: changing public schools to meet the educational needs of all children, addressing the myriad of societal factors that place these children at risk, and, yes, providing quality child care and preschool programs.

Local public schools must radically change three general areas of their operations: kindergarten and first grade entrance requirements, support of high risk students throughout their school experience, and parent education and involvement.

Simply put, public schools must eliminate entrance requirements. They must understand a good school adapts the curriculum to meet the needs of individual students; it does not expect students to adapt to their curriculum. The school system has 12 or 13 years to educate its clients to a predetermined graduation level. By expecting five and six-year-olds to enter the system at the same, uniform level, is to admit the system is unable to adjust to individual needs. How far back are we going to push this entrance requirement? Will babies be required to pass a test before they are born?

School programs, curriculums, teaching strategies and the physical environment must be able to take every child

who meets the cut off date. Each child should be screened, then an individual education program written, and finally a program designed for each child. We must provide individual education for our children; we must finally get away from this archaic idea that all five-year-olds should learn the same content, at the same rate, at the same time; that allowing a child to excel, and addressing the needs of a child who is not developmentally ready for the subject matter or teaching strategy, will destroy our educational goals.

Ironically most gifted programs adopted by public schools recognize stuoents progress at different speeds in different subjects; that students have different learning styles; and that appropriate curriculums for gifted children are individualized. We must expand this concept to cover all children, including those not ready for the overly academic and abstract requirements of most public school kindergartens and first grades.

Part of this individualized approach requires the school to support each child and each developmental domain of the child as she advances through each grade level. When a parent asks a teacher for more work for their child, they usually hear this response: "but she will just know everything by the next grade, and be bored." My daughter, who was the third best gymnast in the state for her age, was told, when she asked for more difficult tasks to do during

her gym class, "who do you think you are, anyway? - do what everyone else does!"

We must determine the kind of supports minority and low-income students need to stay in school and progress; we must articulate why so many Head Start graduates seem to loose their head start once they enter the local public school; and we must make the school experience meaningful to each individual child, rather than expect the child to adapt to the academic relevance of the majority. My suspicion is this will require radical changes in schools as we know them: much smaller schools and smaller classrooms; more male teachers at the elementary level; reduction of competitive school athletics; classes on conflict resolution, ethnic and racial prejudice, culturally relevant sex education, and incentives to keep students in school and academically involved.

Public schools as we know them are failing our high-risk students. We must have a national effort to address this problem.

And, yes, central to this solution are parents. Students simply will not succeed in school without parental support and commitment. Schools must recognize this fact, as should society and parents. We must build stronger parent input into our schools; we must educate parents, before they have children, to their critical role in the education of their children.

We really don't know how to do this - especially for poor and minority families. We don't know because we haven't seen it as important. In fact culturally we have viewed public schools as the societal agent that will undo the negative influences of poor and minority homes, and then educate the next generation in the skills and values of the greater, good society. Obviously the failure of our public schools in meeting the needs of high-risk children is a direct result of this philosophy.

Research must be conducted on effective ways of convincing parents of their educational responsibilities to their children, on programs that work, and on ways schools must change to meet the needs of these families. Again public schools have expected parents to adapt to the school; we must reverse this trend and understand schools must change. I expect these changes to radically alter schools as we know them today. Central to the issue of parents commitment to their child's school success is a need to convince parent's of high risk students that schools care about their children, and that academic success is important. Many parents I have talked to see schools as the enemy, as the institution to fear and dislike. These parents always side with their children in any conflicts between student and school: so to the children the school also becomes the ertity to distrust, and, ultimately to reject. Schools must get parents on their side.

To address children at risk, we must obviously look at the factors that place these children at risk. Teenage parents, dysfunctional families, child abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, poverty, violent neighborhoods, TV addiction, and welfare are some of these factors. Essentially our society has developed into a place where a significant percentage of children will be born in settings where they have almost no chance to succeed. They are born into failure. We must change the fabric of society that produces this failure, and not delude ourselves in believing preschool programs and good school programs will make a significant impact without these changes.

As a society we must recognize the American family is not a good place for many of our children. We must take a hard look at this state of affairs. Conceptually we must create parent education programs, we must convince young people that having a baby is not the ultimate symbol of love - and that impregnanting a girl is not the ultimate symbol of manhood. We must develop programs designed to intercede in dysfunctional and abusive families: we must provide secure, supportive, positive units for children to live in whose families are destructive. We must totally re-design our welfare program to support poor children and their families, not doctors, dentists and social workers.

We must also have the guts to control the crap our children see on TV. We know young children spend more time watching TV than learning in school. We know they watch a

violent, sexy, fantasy world that no adult would claim to be like the real world. Yet to a child whose TV watching is not monitored, and who spends an inordinate amount of time in front of the TV set, TV fantasy is his reality. The tragedy is that young children's moral and ethical development are being created by TV, because at this stage they are forming their moral concepts. If the TV says an argument should be solved with a punch in the nose or a bullet in the stomach, that's what a child will learn; if TV says a person's self worth is determined by wearing the latest shoes and T-shirt, that is what the child will believe.

For children whose only stability in life is TV, the TV is a tremendously negative influence, and must be controlled.

Children having children produces a whole group of high-risk students. It amazes me that children who are so immature they get pregnant, are assumed to have the maturity and responsibility to raise children - a very difficult and responsible job for mature adults. We must examine this epidemic, and look at the rights of these children who are born to teenagers, and who are usually the result or pawn of some romantic spat between two very immature people.

And we must address the other side of this problem: supermacho young men who have not been taught responsibility, how to love another person, how to feel good about themselves, and how to treat women and girls as equal

human beings. These boys are sexist, power hungry, and irresponsible.

Finally as a society we must understand nurturing, functional families don't just happen. They must be created and society must help create more of them. The number of dysfunctional families in society today - especially among the poor and minorities - dictates that we must create public policy that goes beyond supporting existing families: these policies must encourage the development and growth of healthy families, before its too late.

All of this requires some radical changes in business as usual: some unpopular stands for our elected officials. Afterall, the current situation is a direct result of their popular legislation.

As a society we must come to understand America is a very destructive place for many children to grow up. Not because we have designed it that way; but because, in seeking individual freedoms, wealth, power and political clout for adults we have forgotten our children. They don't vote, don't select their child care and school programs, and don't choose their parents. They have no lobbying group, no PACs, and no leaders to represent their point of view.

If we care about our future, care about the quality of future citizens, we must take a hard look at the influences in modern American society that are so destructive to normal child development.

Part of our commitment to our children needs to be quality child care. Previous sections of this book have looked at what constitutes quality child care, and why this care is important. It must be part of a total, much bigger effort, to address the needs of our children. Government should be involved in funding these programs. But it should be done in partnership with private providers. We should not create a parallel, competing system with the private sector. We should provide subsidies, incentives, supports - and, yes, a few regulations - to existing programs and to encourage the establishment of new ones. Government, corporations, child care providers, and concerned parents should be able to package policies that enable parents to select quality care. We might even look at a child care insurance package - like health care - that parents and prospective parents, the government, and corporation pay into. Then, when the parent needs the services, they don't have to pay the full amount. Most important to this effort to address the needs of high-risk students is a national awakening to the idea we are failing an entire segment of our population, and we will continue to fail that segment until we mobilize information, research, TV, and all the resources we have at our disposal. We must understand good parenting does not occur naturally. TV is destructive to the normal development of children, and America in the late 20th century is not a good place to raise children if you belong to a high-risk group.

Public school early childhood and pre-school programs will not positively impact this problem: they might even make it worse.